

STEP Inc. Newsletter

Community Based Environmental Conservation Since 1978. No. 88 February, 1998

COMING EVENTS

CLEAN-UP AUSTRALIA DAY -- Once again it is time to get together for the annual clean-up, which seems to be as necessary this year as ever before.

This year it will be on **Sunday, 1st March**, between **9.00 am and 1.00 pm**, and the STEP site will be at the corner of **Kissing Point Rd. and Vernon St., South Turrumurra**. Jennifer Schwarz will be at the site to register people and to direct them to the locations which require attention.

ABORIGINAL USE OF PLANTS -- A talk by **Jim Kohen** of Macquarie University on **Wednesday, 25th March, 1998 at 8.00 pm**, at the **St. Andrews Uniting Church Hall**, corner of **Vernon St. and Chisholm St., Turrumurra**.

STEP 20TH ANNIVERSARY -- Yes, we are twenty years old this year. We want to honour the pioneers who founded STEP, those who steered it through some difficult early years and those who developed it to achieve the standing it now enjoys in the community. We want to celebrate the passage out of the teenage years and engender renewed energy to promote the appreciation and the enjoyment of our natural bushland.

The details have not yet been finalised, but a sub-committee is working on it, and we have tentatively set the date for **Saturday, 30th May, 1998**. Watch this space for further news.

"Get a Glove and Give Us a Hand"

Ian Kiernan is again asking us to take part in this annual event to demonstrate the community spirit that marks the national character --- a willingness by people to pitch in and do their bit.

It is estimated that more than 800 cities and towns across Australia will be involved in the 1998 clean-up in the spirit that has been exported to other countries through Clean Up the World. Last year 120 countries and 40 million people took part in the third worldwide event.

Ian confidently believes that this year will bring the greatest turnout of volunteers ever. We hope that you will be able to participate in this epic effort.

STEP has again adopted an area site from which volunteers will be directed to spread out to their own neighbourhoods or trouble spots as necessary.

Ku-ring-gai Council will again provide logistic back-up for rubbish removal.

Volunteers will be asked to report any items which are too heavy or otherwise unwieldy so that appropriate means of removal can be organised.

Official sponsors for the Clean Up Australia Day are Westpac, Comet and McDonalds, whereas Qantas, Telstra, Compaq and the Renaissance Sydney Hotel provide a network of support staff and communications.

Ian Kiernan said "Clean Up Australia will keep cleaning up as long as there is a need, but our ultimate aim is to make sure that all dumping stops and there is nothing to collect" Until that point is reached he hopes that more and more volunteers will turn out.



Christmas Barbecue

About thirty people turned up on Sunday, 14th December, 1997, for our Christmas Barbecue at the back of Leuna Ave., Wahroonga.

Some of the neighbours also joined in a very pleasant late afternoon. Animated conversation continued as people enjoyed their refreshments and crowded around the BBQ facilities provided by Neroli and Harry Lock.

It really is a very delightful spot and the area is a credit to Harry and his Bushcare group.

STEP MAP

As mentioned in the last Newsletter our stock of maps has run out and the Committee is looking at the best ways of revising and updating the map to make it as useful and informative as possible. Different formats of presenting the same information have been considered. Showing bush areas in colour or half tone, extending the coverage, and annotating with information on physical features, vegetation notes etc. are under consideration.

ABORIGINAL USE OF PLANTS

Bush tucker is a fascinating topic about which there is not a lot of information readily available. It is closer to home than we might realise, since there are plants in the Sydney region bushland which were used by tribal Aboriginals. And the topic of Aboriginal use of plants goes further than bush tucker, since medicinal uses come into it as well. Our next talk by Jim Kohen from Macquarie University therefore promises to be an interesting introduction to the way Aboriginals used the indigenous flora in their everyday lives.

Entry is free as usual and there will be tea and coffee and biscuits after the talk with plenty of opportunity to engage our visiting speaker in question and answer or in-depth discussion. Please come along and bring any friends who may have an interest in the subject.



BUSHFIRE HAZARD

Although the bushfire season is over for this year, prevention should never be far from our minds if we live adjacent to bushland.

Council has the primary responsibility for fire control and carries this out by control burns or by creating and maintaining fire breaks.

One of the initiatives taken by STEP members in the early days, was to devise the Selective Hand Clearing Method with the objective of protecting property while remaining sensitive to the natural bushland. It is a way of continuously maintaining reduced fuel loads

without degrading bush-land or diminishing biodiversity. The width of fire breaks and the quantity of material required to be removed depends on the aspect, slope, density and structure of the vegetation and the presence of wildlife habitat or rare plant species.



A site assessment needs to be carried out, and that is ideally done, as must any clearing work, in conjunction with and under the supervision of Council's Bushcare officer.

Correctly carried out, with the approval of and under supervision, the selective hand clearing method is a means by which the property owner can contribute to the protection of the property effectively and without destroying the values of the bushland.

Control of weeds is an essential part of such work, and could range from hand pulling to herbicide application or to mowing in areas of poor regeneration prognosis.

Whichever method is appropriate to the particular location, care must be taken to cause minimum soil disturbance.

Where it is necessary to remove native vegetation it is preferable to remove those which are not so rare and are fire prone, eg., remove Casuarina rather than Broadleaved Geebung.

Progressive reduction of fuel is an essential feature of the method. A 6 metre strip adjacent to the property boundary is the final line of defence and should be maintained clear of under storey vegetation and dead material on the ground, except for the bottom 5 cm layer of litter. This strip may also serve as access

for firefighters.

Where the property has dense bush inside the boundary it is necessary to create a fire break adjacent to the house itself.

Firefighting access via the cleared strip also depends on the nature of the terrain. Difficult terrain could prove a trap for firefighters. Beyond the cleared zone the under storey vegetation should be thinned out and any dead material less than 2.5 cm thickness should be removed. The thinning out should be phased out over a width which depends on the site characteristics. Hazard reduction should be carried out in autumn and winter and needs to be followed up every year to maintain its status. Heavily weed infested areas will need more frequent attention.

The effectiveness of the method was again demonstrated by the recent experience in the bushfire of December 1997 in the Coups Creek valley at the back of Browns Rd. The intensity of the approaching fire was effectively reduced to manageable proportions at the back of John Burke's property where John, as a long time promoter of the STEP Selective Hand Clearing Method, has maintained the control buffer strip for many years. John's house would normally be described as being exposed to extreme fire hazard because of its location and because John has practised what he preached by retaining the natural flora in his garden, without introduced species and requiring no watering. A leaflet summarising the STEP Method of Selective Hand Clearing is available from the STEP Committee.

It should be remembered that the advice contained in this leaflet is offered in the same spirit in which many authorities ask residents to be responsible for their properties. It is not intended to replace advice or directions from Council or Fire Authority, or to imply that no other measures are to be taken.

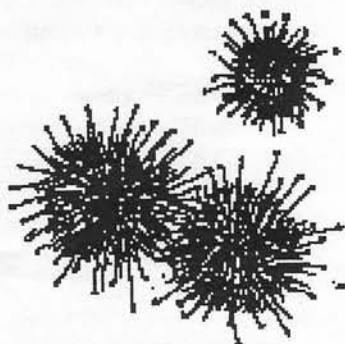
TRANSPORT AGAIN

Nearly five years ago the NSW Nature Conservation Council sponsored a conference on transport for the Sydney metropolitan area to highlight the urban sprawl, pollution, greenhouse gas emission and atmospheric lead levels.

Since then we have had promises from our politicians to change the transport and land use culture, but nothing much has changed. The Olympics 2000 has only served to shift the focus, away from overall solutions for Sydney as a whole. To redirect attention back on to the "main game" the NCC is now organising another conference with the topic "Get Connected".

It will be a two day conference to be held at the Granville TAFE on 17th and 18th April, 1998.

It will seek to address, and receive input from the interested public, on the connection between transport and health, environmental impacts, inequalities of the system, safety, transport politics, funding of a quality transport system and a vision of a desirable future for Sydney. The NCC is at this stage also looking for any other agenda items which impact on the debate. Further information can be obtained from Christine Laurence 9247 4080, Rob Lake 9754 1811, or Chris Goddard 9687 1456.



GOOD DESIGN MANUAL

This residential development control code has now been adopted by Ku-ring-gai Council to come into operation in March, 1998.

The document takes a completely new approach to the control of



residential buildings, to replace the old control document, the Development Control Plan No. 6, which largely failed to achieve its intent, giving rise to considerable dissatisfaction from residents of Ku-ring-gai.

The new document entitled "The Good Design Manual" is a bold step towards encouraging more sympathetic development by allowing architectural creativity, rather than encouraging architects and developers to simply fill the proscribed building envelope to its maximum. It has reduced the extent of prescriptive regulation and has provided performance guidelines as an incentive to better design, hence its adopted title.

The document introduces two new concepts to the process, the requirement for a site analysis and the provision of a visual character study for different areas of Ku-ring-gai as guideline.

These two concepts will have the effect of steering a development proponent in the right direction from the start, and will act as decision criteria for final assessment.

The document sets out the design elements which need to be considered, each with a set of objectives, assessment criteria and design suggestions. They are intended to ensure that streetscape, building form, open space and landscaping, privacy and security, access and parking, water management and ancillary facilities are appropriately addressed.

There is still considerable disquiet in

sections of the community about the absence of strong prescriptive elements in the Good Design Manual and Council accepts that proper implementation of the new code requires much training of officers, and will require a review from time to time to ensure that the intent is carried through and can be shown to have the desired effect. However, the obvious failure of the previous code, the DCP 6, left no doubt in the minds of the advisory committee that the performance approach had a better chance of achieving the desired end result of preserving and enhancing the special character of Ku-ring-gai, than the strictly prescriptive approach. *(Note: The writer declares that he was a member of the advisory committee (KREAC)).*



NATIONAL PARK? LANE COVE RIVER TOTAL CATCHMENT

Most members will be aware that the future of the bushland currently in the ownership and under the control of various Councils in the Lane Cove River Catchment is currently being considered with a view to inclusion into National Park status.

While there has been an initial assessment by NPWS of various portions of bushland to be included, the process has not gone beyond that. The STEP committee is endeavouring to define its views, which may also comprise additional parcels of bushland.

We expect to finalise a position paper during March to submit to the participants of the Committee dealing with the matter.



WASTE -- CONSUMERISM -- MATERIALISM

The connection between waste and consumerism is obvious and the connection between consumerism and materialism also appears to be self evident. But the connection between materialism and waste depends on the meaning we place on the word materialism.

It could be said that the societies of indigenous people are truly materialistic societies since they treat the source of their well being with reverence, and therefore have a much greater respect for the material world.

If we follow this train of thought then we would have to reach the conclusion that we should be more materialistic in order to reduce our propensity to create waste.

I expect that any self respecting philosopher would be able to show up the flaw in this argument.

However, what is clear is that a greater respect for the material sources of our economic activities would result in a more sustainable mode of living and the creation of a whole lot less of the waste which is threatening to overwhelm our urban administrations.

It is disturbing that we are now holding out our model of consumerism to the third world, thus guiding their aspirations towards the same sort of wasteful consumerism, which is causing the problems of global warming, rapid depletion of resources and fouling up life support systems of the earth. Our mode of life is shown through selective images of wealth which

appear to guarantee a smooth passage through life with endless fun, entertainment and perpetual distractions from the pain which much of the population of the developing world knows to be their lot.

At the same time it is quite clear that the consumption patterns of the richest portion of the worlds people cannot be replicated for the remainder. It is irrational to think otherwise, even with the most rapid technological advances, and yet that process is presented as inevitable, and encouraged by the policies of every Government in the world.

The statistics of waste are staggering:

- * for every 100kg of products manufactured, 3200kg of waste is created,
 - * in the USA waste is produced at the rate of 450kg per person per year
- The waste generated comprises:
- * 1.6 billion kg of carpet
 - * 2,7 billion kg of polystyrene
 - * 13 billion kg of food
 - * 136 billion kg of organic and inorganic chemicals
 - * 320 billion kg of hazardous waste from chemical production.



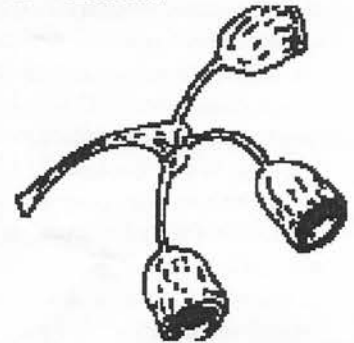
And looking at it a bit differently, the British dump 2.5 billion nappies a year, the Japanese dump 30 million disposable single roll cameras a year and North Americans discard 183 million razors, 2.7 billion batteries and 350 million pressurised spray-paint cans.

These are the things we see, but what we don't see is the inefficiencies in manufacturing which cause massive waste.

One expert estimates that 94 % of materials extracted for manufacture becomes waste before we see the product.

Various ideas have been generated to address this inefficiency, and this is attractive to manufacturers since it would also save money.

This is the line taken by a new study called Factor 4: Doubling Wealth, Halving Resource Use by Amory Lovins, L.H.Lovins and E. von Weizsaecker.



That approach, successfully applied would solve one part of the problem, but it still leaves the other part, which is the consumerist attitudes so firmly implanted in the minds of the citizens of the developed world and about to be instilled into those in the developing world.

It is also interesting to see how the world stacks up in consumerism terms:

- * 1.1 billion people have an income greater than US\$7,500 p.a. and are classified as the consumer class
- * 3.3 billion people are in the world's middle income class o between US\$700 and US\$7,500 p.a. and are attuned to acquisition of only durable goods
- * 1.1 billion people have an income below US\$700 p.a. and are the world's poor. They have insufficient of life's necessities, and generally use 'waste' rather than create it.

These numbers are a stark indication as to why the current consumerism is ecologically unsustainable.

(The above is based on articles by Jeremy Seabrook and Vanessa Baird in NI October 1997.) Ed.